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THE LOW LIBRARY—A HISTORY

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THE LIBRARY OF THE
JUN 20 1924
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

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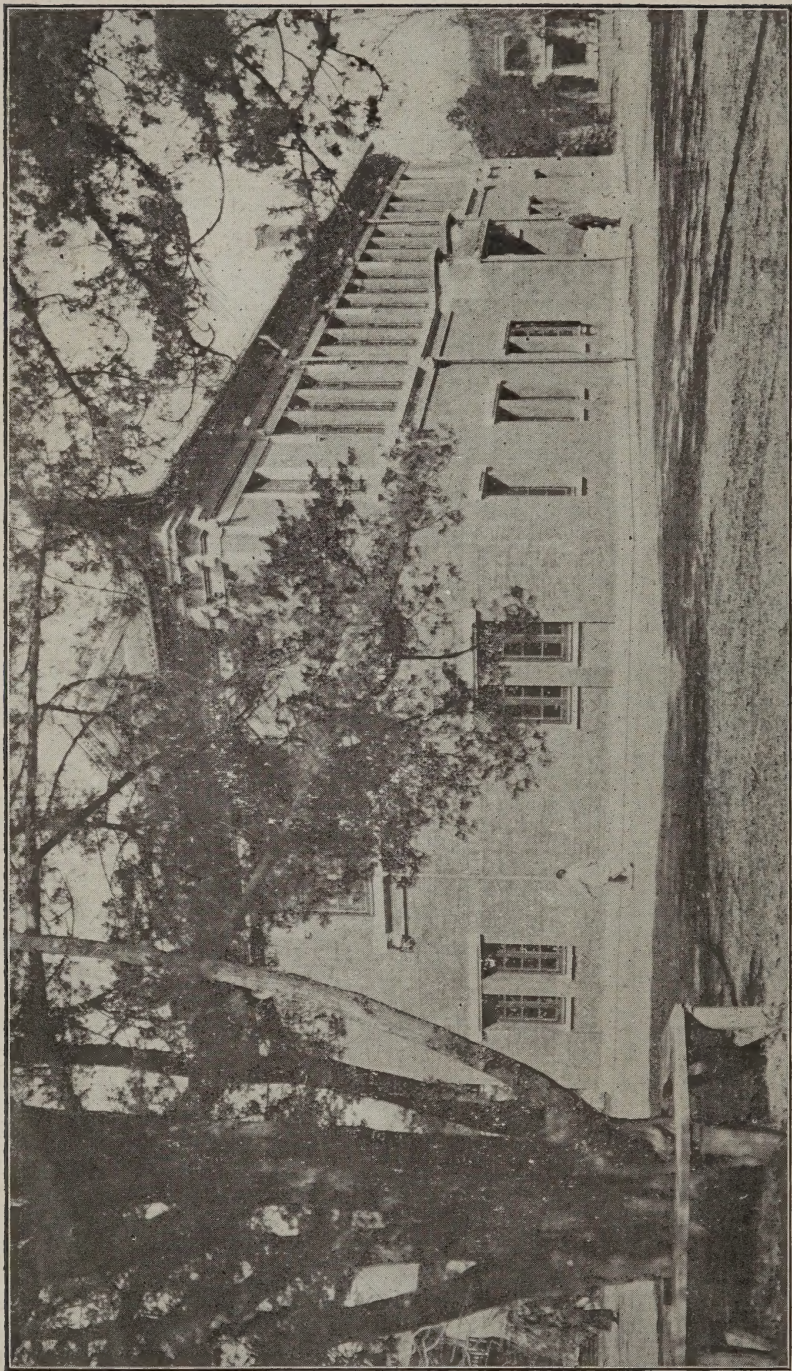
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THE LIBRARY OF ILLINOIS

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

The Low Library; A History*

(1894—1923)

V. L. WONG

The St. John's University library—Low Library—like the University itself, had a very insignificant beginning. It started about thirty years ago with a few volumes of Chinese and some copies of old theological books. Through the generosity of friends in America and China, however, and with a small yearly appropriation from the college, the library has grown year by year. Since 1915, it has been in its own building, Anniversary Hall. With a trained and experienced librarian and staff, the library to-day can rightfully claim to be one of the best college libraries in China.

When the Rev. Dr. F. L. Hawks Pott took charge of St. John's College in 1888, strictly speaking there was no library. There was a small room containing some Chinese books which had been collected by Bishop Schereschewsky. Some of these books were quite valuable, but they were not at the disposal of the students. There was at the same time in Bishop Boone's residence a Mission Library, consisting largely of books of theology. To the educators of modern China, these collections would look small and out-of-date, but the Library of to-day grew from these two private collections: the books that formed the nucleus of the present library were those collected by Bishops Schereschewsky and Boone. The help, energy and devotion of others have developed and built it up, and the library of to-day is the result.

From the beginning, we can trace the steps of progress and expansion of the library through its location in the different buildings of the University. From the Main Building to Yen Hall, from Yen Hall to the Administration Building, from the Administration Building to the present Anniversary Hall, the history of the St. John's library is a story of gradual growth both in size and usefulness. To estimate the development of the library by the number of buildings it occupied is a graphic method, but it indicates well enough the real advance which has been made.

I. MAIN BUILDING PERIOD, 1894-1904.

What we may call the first period of the college library began with

* The writer has been led to write this article because of the growing interest in the library. As the material on the subject is very widely scattered, the history as it is may not be entirely complete. The writer wishes to thank all those who offered help in the work.

19 June 1924. 9. President - University of St. John's - Shanghai, China.

4 May 25

the erection of the present Middle School Building. When this building was formally opened in September, 1894, a room on the second floor in the north-west corner was provided for the library. The Mission Library, which had been in Bishop Boone's residence, was moved to this room as were also the Chinese books collected by Bishop Schereschewsky. Rev. F. K. Woo, one of the first graduates of the School of Theology, was appointed librarian. It was in this library room that the Bishops of what is now the Chung Hwa Sheng Kung Hui (中華聖公會) used to hold their annual meetings, and the Committee on the translation of the prayer book also met here. The room was at the same time used as a theological classroom.

In the spring of 1899, the library was removed to the first floor below the original room. In the winter of 1900, Miss M. E. Wood of the Boone University library, Wuchang, who was at St. John's as a refugee on account of the Boxer Uprising, kindly undertook the work of organizing the library. That the care of the library at this time was already too much for one person was shown by the appointment of Mr. V. Z. Waung as assistant in the spring of 1903. New books were gradually added and the record of donated books showed an increase. Books belonging to the late Rev. Y. K. Yen from his son Mr. W. W. Yen were among the first ones received. The total accessions of the library at this time were about 3,000 volumes, including Chinese and English books.

II. YEN HALL PERIOD, 1904-11.

When Yen Hall was erected in 1904, the library was moved to the ground-floor rooms near the southwest corner. It was at this time named the Low Library in honor of Mr. Seth Low and his brother, Mr. William G. Low, of New York, both of whom made generous contributions to the building fund. Mr. Seth Low was at that time Mayor of New York City and later became President of Columbia University. The library was still in charge of Rev. F. K. Woo, who was succeeded in the following year by Mr. B. S. Wang, an alumnus and at one time an assistant librarian of the Shanghai Library. Prof. M. P. Walker was then acting as faculty adviser. It was Mr. Walker, who, upon the suggestion of Mr. Lewis S. Palen, a member of the faculty, started to reorganize the library and classify the books according to the Dewey Decimal system. At this time, printed catalogs of the books were issued. With Mr. Walker, the history of the Low Library might be said to have entered upon the middle period. Among the books donated to the library at this time were the valuable books on Chinese history and Western science from the Liang Kiang Viceroy Chow Fu,

(兩江學務處周總理) consisting of 189 sets, all of which are the best productions of the two well-known government presses—the Kiang-tsoo (江楚編譯書局) and the Kiangnan Arsenal (江南製造局). A set of books on the "Life of Li Hung-chang" in 100 volumes was also received from a Chinese friend, one Mr. Lieu.

The Commercial Press was also among the list of donors. In the English section, a gift of 1,000 volumes, mostly theology, philosophy and fiction, was bequeathed to the library from the collection of the late Rev. Prof. A. S. Mann. Mr. W. W. Yen also presented a valuable set of Encyclopaedia Britannica, which added strength to the reference section of the library. The members of the class of 1904 also made a greatly appreciated gift of \$60.00 Mex. annually for a number of years to the President for the purchase of books for the library. It was with this money that Dr. Pott purchased in yearly instalments the well-known set of "The Historians' History of the World."

In the summer of 1907, Mr. Wang resigned and Mr. L. Y. Ho was appointed librarian. He resigned the following year and Mr. T. Z. Dzung was appointed as his successor. In June, 1909, Mr. Dzung resigned and in September, Mr. T. C. Tai, now head of the Tsing Hua College library, Peking, was appointed to fill the position. Prof. M. H. Throop succeeded Prof. Walker as faculty adviser. The hours of opening were increased in order to be of greater service to the faculty and students. The library was then open for 7 hours daily from 9-12 a.m. and 1-4 p.m. (Saturday afternoons and Sundays excepted) and every evening in the week from 7-8 (Saturdays and Sundays excepted). On Saturday and Sunday evenings, it was open from 7:40-9:00. The records at this time showed that the library contained 3,000 English books and 190 sets of Chinese books, or about 1,900 separate volumes.

III. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING PERIOD, 1911-15.

When the University purchased in 1911 the Unkaza property, the present Zau Foong Garden, the library was again removed and occupied what are now the Administration Offices (except the Dean's office). Mr. Tai was still in charge as librarian, and T. H. Zung was his assistant. The hours of opening were again increased, thus making them 7-9 every evening instead of 7-8. The accessions of books at this time were 5,000 volumes in English and 4,432 volumes in Chinese, consisting of 391 sets.

IV. ANNIVERSARY HALL PERIOD, 1915.

In the summer of 1914, Mr. Tai resigned and Mr. H. Y. Hsu was appointed librarian with Y. Z. Tseu as assistant. It was then the

occasion of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Dr. Pott's Presidency at St. John's. A donation of \$1,000.00 Mex. for Chinese books was made to the library on this occasion by the Commercial Press. The alumni, students of the University, and Dr Pott's friends, both foreign and Chinese, contributed towards the erection of a permanent building for the University library as a fitting memorial of the president's anniversary. In the winter of the same year 1914, ground was broken for the purpose, and the corner-stone was laid on New Year's Day, 1915. In the early summer, the new building was completed, and the books and furniture were moved in, ready for the formal opening in September.

The building, occupying an area of about 5,200 sq. ft., cost Tls. 20, 000. It is a two storied structure, the ground floor being temporarily used for academic work. The library proper occupies the entire upper floor which consists of two large rooms—one for the stack room on the south and the other for the reading room on the north—with the librarian's office between. It was estimated that space was provided for shelving 30,000 volumes, and that as the collections of books grew, more shelves could be added. The open shelf system was adopted, thus giving every one easy access to all the books in the library. In both the stack room and the reading room, seats and tables are provided, so that students may do their reference work with the needed volumes close at hand. The reading room, with standard reference books on one side and bound periodicals on the other, is spacious enough to accommodate comfortably about 100 readers. Newspapers and current magazines are also to be found in this room. It will not be out of place to mention here that a part of the new furniture of the library was purchased with a sum of money presented to the University by the father of the late Wei Ung-yoong, a promising medical student, who, shortly before his death, requested that the money which his parents had expected to spent on his marriage ceremonies should be given to the University from which he had received so many advantages. A brass tablet in the stack room commemorates this gift.

In the autumn of 1916, Mr. Hsu, after two years' service in the library, went to the United States for special training in library science. Mr. Y. Z. Tseu was appointed acting-librarian with T. D. Hyui as assistant and Prof. H. F. MacNair as faculty adviser. Among the new books purchased was a set of valuable Chinese books, entitled "Ta Tsing Wei Tien Z Lih" (大清會典事例) in 400 volumes. It is a complete description of the Chinese government of the Tsing dynasty, which greatly adds to the material for research in Chinese government

and politics. Two of the most notable donations of books to the library received at this time were one in memory of the late Prof. F. C. Cooper, and the other in memory of the Rev. Joseph Peck Robinson of the Diocese of New York. The record of English books in the library at this time was about 6,800 volumes and that of Chinese, about 5,300 volumes.

In the summer of 1917, Mr. Hsu returned to St. John's as librarian, well equipped with special knowledge and practical training. With Mr. Hsu, we can say that the history of the Low Library began its modern period—the period of reconstruction. In both organization and administration, Mr. Hsu aimed for material improvement. The work of re-cataloging of the old books was then undertaken. The old catalog was gradually replaced by a better and more up-to-date system of cataloging. The books began to be classified according to the Dewey Decimal Classification and combined with the Cutter author numbers. By putting books on the same subject together, the convenience in locating a book was assured. The card catalog, which provides for expansion, is in dictionary form. The catalog cards are typewritten. Mr. T. Z. Woo was appointed to do the work, and the first typewriter the library possessed was one presented in February, 1918, by Mr. George Zabriskie.

Towards the end of the year 1917, Mr. Hsu became ill and was obliged to suspend his work for medical treatment at Kuling. By the autumn of the following year, he seemed to have regained his normal health and returned to resume his work in the library. But in November, he was again obliged to stop work, and tendered his resignation.* Mr. Tseu was then appointed librarian with H. T. Woo, now assistant librarian at Tsing Hua College, Peking, as assistant. The loss of Mr. Hsu from the library staff was a severe blow but we are glad to say that the foundation of our present system had already been laid by his faithful services. It was at this time that the St. John's Low Library was placed on the list of depository libraries of the Carnegie Institution of Washington. This meant that the library would receive the complete set of publications from the Institution. Several very valuable collections of books from private libraries were also received during this period. Among these, the collections of the late Archdeacon Thomson and of the late Rev. Dr. James Jackson, former President of Boone University, Wuchang, are worthy of especial mention. The Jackson library consisted of 3,000 well selected books, in English and Chinese,

* After leaving St. John's, Mr. Hsu went to Kuling again and stayed there until November, 1922, when he was appointed librarian of Nan Kai College, Tientsin. In February, 1922, he suffered a relapse and died on March 10, 1923, at the age of 32.

on a variety of subjects—theology, history, biography, English literature and science. These, together with gifts from other sources, added greatly to the strength of the library. The total accessions at this time amounted to 11,300 volumes in English and 5,600 volumes in Chinese.

In June, 1920, Mr. H. T. Woo resigned to join the Tsing Hua College library staff in Peking. Mr. V. L. Wong was appointed assistant librarian. It happened that the librarian Mr. Tseu became ill and was unable to return, and Mr. Wong, with Prof. MacNair as faculty adviser, took care of the affairs of the library. Student assistants were engaged to give temporary help in the work. One of the first things Mr. Wong did during his administration was to attempt to check up the accession records of the books in the library. The difficulty, in fact an utter impossibility, to answer inquiries as to the total number of Chinese or English books in the library made him bring about one noticeable change. Both English and Chinese books had been accessioned together in one record, which did not enable the librarian to tell the exact number of each in the library. Steps were taken to re-accession in a separate record all the Chinese books that were in the library and also to accession in this new record the books that were added. A similar record was made of the Middle School books, as it was thought that when a complete division of the Middle School and the College libraries was necessary, this separate record would be of value.

After these records had been begun, the cataloging of the Chinese books was started. The Chinese collection in the library had been classified and shelf-listed. This merely brought together the books on various subjects; it was difficult to determine whether the library had a book by a certain author. So the idea of cataloging each book under its author, subject and title led to the adoption of a dictionary catalog for the Chinese books. The cataloging of Chinese books, due to the absence of a suitable classification scheme, is a difficulty and a problem to many of the Chinese librarians. However, through inquiries and help from others, a workable system was obtained. Within a few months, the re-cataloging was completed, and a mimeographed list of the books cataloged was issued. When the shelves were rearranged, a better impression was given of the number of Chinese books in the library.

As the Chinese collection at St. John's was much too small, notices were then sent out to both teachers and students encouraging the recommendation of new books for the library. As a result, through the interest of Mr. T. W. Tsha of the Chinese faculty, Mr. H. I. Lieu of

Huchow presented to the library a set of his privately printed books amounting to about 300 separate volumes. At the same time, a recommendation to purchase the set of "Literary Collections of the Four Classes" (四部叢刊) published by the Commercial Press was submitted to the President, and it was decided to purchase this valuable set.

In June, 1921, Prof. MacNair went to America on furlough and Prof. Donald Roberts succeeded him as faculty adviser. Mr. Wong was still in charge of the library with K. J. Lee as assistant. Mr. C. T. Yang succeeded T. Z. Woo as cataloger. With the growing need, it was found necessary to add more shelves both in the stack room and the reading room. A decision was also made to have the library open one more hour in the evening. In order to guard against the possible abuse of the privilege of having free access to the shelves of the stack room, honor system was then applied to the use of the library. A form of pledge was drawn up and printed, and students were required to sign upon entering the library stacks. This not only showed the application of the honor system along a new line at St. John's, but it also marked a distinct step in the history of the library administration. The St. John's library has adopted the open shelf system since 1915, and it is gratifying to note that it has worked out very well. Some books are lost; cases of hiding books from the use of others were reported; but all these were over-balanced by the gain to the students of having free and full use of the library at all time. The application of the honor system is also one way of fostering the practice of an open shelf system. The library at this time had an English collection of 12,300 volumes and a Chinese collection of about 6,000 volumes. Through subscriptions and exchanges, more than 80 English and 20 Chinese magazines were received. The number of books circulated during the year was 10,000, of which 1,800 volumes were Chinese books. The total number of books added during the year was 500 volumes English and 200 volumes Chinese.

In February, 1922, Miss Florence C. Hays of the University of Wisconsin library staff was appointed librarian at St. John's. With the experience Miss Hays had had in various libraries, she tried in every way to reorganize the library and put it on a more scientific basis. When Mr. Lee resigned in June, Mr. Z. K. Sze was appointed to take his place. One of the first things Miss Hays did was to continue the work on the library records. In order to make the accession books accurate, a withdrawal record was necessary. Books worn out or lost were withdrawn and entered in the withdrawal book in order to show the actual number of volumes in the library. A register was also started in

order to know the exact number of borrowers at the library. In September, 1922, teachers and students taking books were asked to sign an application card and were given a registration number which was to be used as the borrower's number when taking books. At the same time, a set of new rules and regulations governing the lending of books and the use of the library was printed. The former system of charging books was modified, and the plan for reserving books for class use was reorganized. The collection of bound periodicals was reclassified and made more available to the students through the purchase of the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. For the convenience of the readers, the loan desk was moved to the stack room in March, 1923, and the former desk room was made the office of the librarian and a cataloging room.

In May, the Science Library, the first departmental library, was opened in the new Science Laboratory Building. Books relating to physics, chemistry and biology were moved there for the convenience of the instructors and the students. Mr. Yang from the staff was appointed assistant in charge. An author and title card catalog of the books was made. Mr. W. S. Leigh was appointed to fill the vacancy thus left on the main library staff.

On May 21, Mr. Thomas Hu, a graduate of New York Public Library School and a member of the Boone University library staff, upon the invitation of the librarian, spoke on "China and the Library Movement" in the library reading room. The lecture, illustrated with statistical charts and pictures of the American Library Association Exhibit, attracted a large number.

In December, 1922, the President of the University was informed of a pledge of \$1,000.00 Gold annually for three years from the Church Periodical Club of New York to provide for new books for the library. This makes it possible to allow more from the annual appropriation of the college for the building up of the Chinese collection in the library during the period of reorganization of the Chinese Department. The library receives an annual appropriation from the University of \$3,000.00 Mex. which is allotted to the various departments according to their size. Added to the expenses for newspapers and periodicals, binding and supplies, furniture and equipment, salaries, and wages, the entire expenditure of the library varies from \$8,000.00 to \$9,000.00 Mex. a year.

In June, 1923, word was received from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, that the Low Library of St. John's

University had been placed on its list of depository libraries. All publications of the Endowment are sent gratuitously to the library.

From the above and from other sources, the library has received from time to time many volumes of interest. A special effort is made to build up a good working library on China and the Far East. In order to maintain a good bibliography of the books concerned and to serve as an aid in book selection, the library has subscribed for the Library of Congress cards on the subject. Several very rare and valuable books on China have been given by an alumnus, His Excellency, the Chinese Minister to Washington, Dr. S. K. Alfred Sze.

Among a few of the rare works on China, we may mention D'Anville: *Nouvel Atlas de la Chine, de la Tartarie, Chinoise, et du Thibet*, The Hague, 1737; Louis Le Comte: *Beschryvinge van het Machtige Keyserry China*, 1698; *La Chine Illustree d'Athanase*, Amsterdam, 1667-70; L'Abbe Grosier: *De ls Chine*, Paris, 1818; Du Halde: *Description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary*, London, 1738; Eusebius Renaudot: *Ancient Accounts of India and China by Two Mohammedan Travellers*, London, 1733; James Legge's *Chinese Classics*, and an almost complete set of the *Chinese Repository*.

In addition, one may find other volumes of equal interest: a set of the *Biblia Sac a Polyglotta*, Imprimebat, Thomas Roycroft, MDCLVII, Edidit Brianus Waltonus, S. T. D., Londini, with an accompanying *Lexicon Heptaglotta* by Edmunds Castello from the same printer; the *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturae Interpretum*, London, 1676; and also the very rare and finest of all editions of Philo Judaeus, Paris, 1640, "cum regis privilegio." One who is interested in the study of Chinese porcelains will find the two volume set printed in 1904-1911 privately for James Pierpont Morgan in a 250 copy edition.

The following facts condensed from the librarian's report, 1922-23, are worth mentioning. The library at present has a staff of seven members--one librarian, one assistant librarian, one cataloger, two day assistants and two evening assistants. There are also three servants, one doing cleaning, one doing much desk work and the other, some mending and some binding. The records of the library ending June 30, 1923, showed that the total accessions of both Chinese and English books had reached 23,899, of which 292 volumes belonged to the Middle School collection and 9000 volumes to the Chinese collection. In the pamphlet group, there were 35 Chinese and 416 English pamphlets. During the year, the library received 26 Chinese and 71 English magazines, and 6 Chinese and 2 English daily newspapers. By exchange and gift, there were received about 50 Chinese and 75 English school papers.

During the year, 1,065 English books ; 270 English and 35 Chinese pamphlets ; and 261 Chinese books were added. The withdrawal record showed that 166 English volumes, either lost or worn out, had been withdrawn. The number of old books re-cataloged amounted to 684, new books cataloged, 1,606, making a total of 2,290 books cataloged during the year. The borrowers' register showed that 677 readers had applied for library cards. The number of books circulated during the year was 23,349, of which 3,587 volumes were Chinese. The following statistics are interesting :

Comparative Circulation by Year

Year	No. of Vols. (Chinese)	No. of Vols. (English)	Total
1915-16	1,657	3,623	5,280
1916-17	2,818	4,541	7,359
1917-18	2,657	4,729	7,386
1918-19	1,831	4,516	6,347
1919-20	1,347	4,195	5,542
1920-21	1,784	5,123	6,907
1921-22	1,821	6,735	8,556
1922-23	3,587	19,762	23,349

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(The 40th Anniversary Booklet)

Comparative Circulation by Month

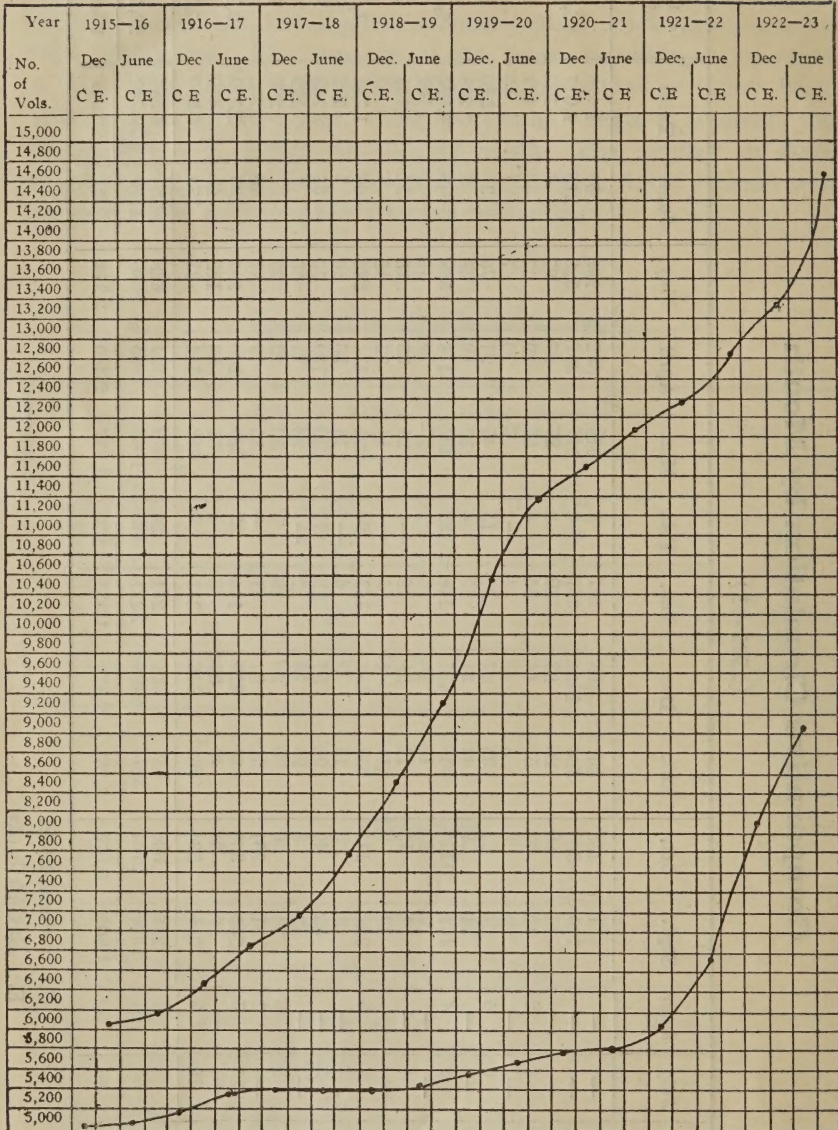
(1922-23)

Month Class of books	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	Total	Grand total
General	—	—	51	133	207	105	107	8	216	302	293	54	1,476	
works	—	—	170	356	764	1034	357	6	145	397	523	275	4,017	5,493
Philosophy	—	—	15	20	23	23	20	2	27	27	27	6	190	
Religion	1	2	42	63	53	44	34	4	87	89	17	43	479	669
C.	—	—	2	8	3	3	4	—	5	10	7	1	43	
E.	6	6	59	61	36	47	31	15	45	91	76	37	510	553
Sociology	—	—	34	39	44	34	20	4	32	46	38	8	298	
E.	8	4	452	1114	953	427	149	22	407	178	578	405	4,697	4,995
Philology	—	—	9	11	13	14	6	1	17	19	10	2	102	
E.	1	—	6	13	11	28	12	—	21	33	25	11	161	263
Science	—	—	13	9	11	4	5	—	11	17	12	4	83	
E.	8	3	222	175	239	187	113	29	224	171	224	166	1,761	1,844
Useful	—	—	9	5	19	5	6	—	14	20	16	7	102	
arts	3	—	65	49	98	54	29	26	130	109	75	65	703	805
Fine arts	—	—	13	8	26	22	12	—	23	21	16	7	139	
E.	2	3	34	36	30	33	19	1	32	23	41	22	265	404
Literature	—	—	91	101	92	84	41	9	80	79	87	40	705	
E.	28	5	245	306	424	319	144	33	325	260	294	196	2,579	3,284
History	—	—	59	34	49	39	13	1	54	53	122	25	449	
E.	10	8	315	534	666	346	333	9	442	544	833	550	4,590	5,039
Total	1	1	296	368	487	324	234	24	479	594	628	151	3,587	
E.	67	31	1610	2707	3274	2498	1231	145	1858	1895	2886	1770	19,762	23,349
Grand total	68	32	1,905	3,075	3,761	2,822	1,455	169	2,337	2,489	3,314	1,921	23,349	23,349

C.: Chinese books

E.: English books

Comparative Accession by Year



C.: Chinese books (lower curve) E.: English books (upper curve)



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